

ENI SEIS II East project

First Regional Consultation Meeting

Tuesday, 7 June 2016, 14:00 – 17:30

Hotel Oasis – Chakvi, Georgia

MINUTES OF THE MEETING

BACKGROUND AND SETTING THE SCENE

The workshop aimed to launch the second phase of the Shared Environmental Information System Project in Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries. The ENI SEIS II East project started on 1st February 2016, being implemented by the European Environment Agency (EEA). The project will be carried out during a 4-year period (1 February 2016–31 January 2020). Its goals and activities built on the ENPI-SEIS project, implemented in 2010-15. The workshop was attended by government representatives from all six EaP countries, where SEIS II has identified two National Focal Points from both statistical offices and environmental ministries. Representatives of Austria, Eurostat, UNECE, World Health Organisation and Zoi Environment Network (Framework Contractors) were also present.

The agenda was constructed around three key elements (see in Annex 1):

- (i) presentation of project goals and milestones;
- (ii) national perspectives – towards the development of national work plans;
- (iii) synergies with partners and better regional coordination.

Prior to the meeting, the following supporting documents were shared with participants: SEIS II East project's Description of Action; an overview of project governance and methodology; and Draft Work Plan. The meeting participants (see full list in Annex 2):

- Expressed satisfaction with the outcomes of SEIS Phase I and re-iterated demand for continuing activities in support of improved environmental information management, especially in the light of the Association Agreements implementation;
- Took note of the project presentation and suggested that specific targets be identified regionally and nationally as part of the project's logframe, in line with the need to focus on results;
- Highlighted the need to consider synchronisation of the project activities with national plans, thus making assistance timely and meaningful;
- Underscored the value of experience exchange with the EU Member States and the importance of complementary twinning projects;
- Provided feedback on national priorities, with a focus on receiving methodological support and training, improving data collection and institutional coordination mechanisms, establishing electronic reporting and extending the public availability of existing and new environmental information, and preparing regular assessment reports;



- Highlighted some of the project implementation risks, such as political and institutional instability, and high staff turnover;
- Called for more attention to specific knowledge rather than repetition of trainings on generalist knowledge;
- Re-iterated the need to further improve monitoring infrastructure (this is not part of the project);
- Urged to arrange country visits shortly after the kick-off workshop and expressed their readiness to come with more specific ideas on country-level activities during those visits;
- Took note of synergies that exist with activities carried out by other partners, and stressed the need to work on various sets of indicators in a coherent and well-coordinated way.

In his opening remarks, Hans Bruyninckx, EEA Executive Director, started his opening remarks by highlighting the long-standing cooperation with the ENI East region, spreading over the past 20 years. He emphasized that the current context of the cooperation under European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) is embedded in the Agency's multi-annual work programme 2014-2019, and will be addressed in a cross-Agency manner. He also underlined the importance of the Eionet partners in the 39 member and collaborating countries as the major strength allowing the Agency to fulfil its main mandate to deliver data, information and knowledge for sound environmental policy-making. Mr. Bruyninckx also touched upon the recent agreement between the EEA-UNECE-UNEP on a joint approach to support the establishment a regular environmental assessment process based on the SEIS across the pan-European region. This is an illustration of the value-added the EEA can have into supporting the knowledge base, networking and approach at a wider international and global level.

Further on, David Stanners, Head of the Partnerships and Networks programme at the EEA, highlighted the importance of building on the previous cooperation, in particular under the provided reflections on the ENPI-SEIS project (implemented in the period January 2010-March 2015) and the InSEIS project (June 2014-October 2015). Acknowledging lessons learned during this previous cooperation, some slight differences in approach for the new project were presented, such as:

- balance between regional versus national approach, where regional support shall be based on the national needs and priorities;
- based on the Eionet model, the establishment of a wider inter-institutional group proposed in order to oversee and coordinate national SEIS developments and project activities;
- more efforts to be invested in production of policy-relevant assessments based on indicators, which in turn are built in a coherent regional manner;
- more efforts were needed also on SEIS visibility and communication at national level, including a stronger engagement of the civil society.

DG NEAR Project manager/representative highlighted the need for strong synergies between projects and among partners, highlighting the important link between environment and development, and the expected contribution to the citizens' well-being. Reference was made to the recent review of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) which emphasised the benefits for the citizens and the ownership of the countries in this process that allowed for differentiated approach. Furthermore, DG NEAR Project manager touched upon the synergies among different activities within the EU neighbourhood and SEIS, as well as the importance of the work at national level in ensuring the appropriate connections to the benefit of the national needs.



PRESENTATION ON THE PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The ENI SEIS II East project objectives were presented by Galina Georgieva and Jean-Nicolas Poussart, representing the EEA project team, covering the areas of work, a brief overview of the governance structure and methodology as well as important milestones to consider during the implementation. The presentation, together with all background documents will be made available on the project website (currently under development: <http://eni-seis.eionet.europa.eu/east>).

The subsequent discussion revolved around the long-term objectives and the key building blocks of the cooperation, covering such aspects as:

- National work plans on SEIS to be developed and endorsed by the national authorities, with country-specific activities, targets and performance indicators for the implementation. The national level approach is important due to diverging issues at national level.
- An objective continued to be strengthened is the regular production, access, and use of environmental indicators as a contribution towards knowledge-based policy-making and good governance in the field of environment – and in that context, the partner countries work on agreed methodologies to improve the production and sharing of indicators would continue in line with the previous work of UNECE set of environmental indicators. The connection with the SDG indicators is still to be explored.
- Clear protocols/agreements for institutional cooperation in terms of data management should be further developed to enable regular and timely data flows (national and international), with a coherent environmental data policy for public access – a process that could be potentially overseen by an inter-institutional “SEIS National Implementation Teams”.
- Greater emphasis needs to be placed on transforming available indicators into policy-relevant information – therefore building capacity on integrated environmental assessments, by also linking a wider set of partners from different Ministries.

In addition, David Stanners underlined the SEIS should be seen as a set of horizontal supportive activities aimed at improving the way countries gather and share environmental information in order to supply data for various relevant processes. The ultimate goal of the project is to come to a more transparent system of sharing solid environmental data in the pan-European region.

The first Steering Committee is planned for autumn 2016, when country visits to all partner countries are completed and national work plans are developed.

REFLECTIONS FROM THE COUNTRIES ON NATIONAL PRIORITIES

In the session on sharing national priorities and perspectives as a step towards the development of national work plan, the country representatives raised a number of issues to do with the achievements from the previous cooperation, current challenges and possible ideas for the future work. It was mentioned that the first consultation visit to Moldova was done by the EEA team on 27-28 April 2016, while the visits to the other five partner countries are to be organised in the coming months.



Armenia:

- A framework Law on the environment and shared environmental system has been drafted, to provide a legal basis for the development and implementation of SEIS and Integrated Monitoring System in line with conventions and relevant international processes.
- MoU on inter-institutional cooperation between the Ministry of Nature Protection and the National Statistical Service of the Republic of Armenia, covering all the environmental indicators, has been developed and is expected to be shortly signed.
- Need to improve reporting to ArmStatBank (<http://armstatbank.am/>), as the centralised system to disseminate all environmental statistics and indicators. Today, certain areas lack data, such as particulate matters, water balance, soil and biodiversity.
- Relevance of actions building on the previous ENPI-SEIS work, such as further work on definitions in the GEneral Multilingual Environmental Thesaurus (GEMET) in Armenian, as well as the continuation of the SEIS for Lake Sevan pilot (covering both water quality and water quantity aspects).
- Relevance to address biodiversity monitoring, as an area that needs further attention
- Need to look into the establishment of National Implementation Team and national environmental portal.
- Building stronger links with the research society.

Azerbaijan:

- The Environmental Indicators System of the Republic (<http://www.stat.gov.az/menu/7/indexen.php>) has been developed considering the regional UNECE indicator guidelines, and include methodologies and metadata.
- Key expectation is to continue the close relationship with the UNECE Joint Task Force on Environmental Indicators (JTFEI) and address new areas such as indicators on waste and agriculture.
- Methodological and expert support from EEA on a number of areas welcomed.

Belarus:

- A lot has been done on environmental information: 12 types of monitoring in place, working on improving the monitoring system and reporting; the results were captured by the last national SoE report (2015) and EPR. SEIS principles are largely integrated.
- Good cooperation between Belstat and MoE was underlined with about 90% of the recommended indicators made available online.
- While the national monitoring system is in place, it remains difficult to aggregate and have access to all available data in one centralised space. Initial discussions between Belarus and UNEP have been initiated on the use of UNEPLive as a suitable way to address this.
- There are plans to expand the list of environmental indicators to cover a wider range of topics, and also make data and indicators available in formats that are easier to be used by multiple users (e.g. Excel).
- Expectations from SEIS link to creating similar approaches and methodologies used in the partner countries to facilitate the dialogue.



Georgia:

- Georgia is interested in further cooperation and looks towards more tangible outcomes; revisiting of the 2014 Letter of Intent with the EEA is needed to establish the modalities of cooperation with the EEA.
- The Ministry of Environment and Natural Resource Protection (MENRP) and the National Statistics Office (GeoStat) signed a MoU to facilitate the data exchange.
- The established Environmental Information and Education Centre (EIEC) is tasked to disseminate data and information, but further training/capacity building is needed to strengthen this Centre and its services.
- During the ENPI-SEIS project, Georgia had taken part in a pilot exercise to share water data for rivers and lakes as per the WISE SoE methodologies and tools. There is interest to build on this to continue cooperation in the area.
- Regular indicator-based SoE is one of the Ministry's priorities. Work is ongoing in Georgia to select the indicators for the next national SoER, to cover the 2014-2017 period (follow the example of indicator-based chapter on air, supported by the previous cooperation).
- Monitoring infrastructure needs strengthening in order to fulfil the obligations under the EU Association Agreement. Gaps in the environmental information exists (e.g. on waste), but whenever there is data it is open and publicly available.

Moldova:

- The initial visit by the project team that took place the 27-28 April was instrumental to review and discuss the project areas in detail.
- Some proposals for national support are being evaluated, such as support for improving the air monitoring system, which does not provide the necessary data for the emission inventory under the CLRTAP Convention.
- Big institutional reform upcoming with EPA to be set up by next year – advice and support needed for developing the concept of the integrated monitoring system and expert training.
- The model of an inter-agency Working Group deployed under the EaP Green project could be adequate for establishing a SEIS National Implementation Team.
- Expectations to build on the strengthened capacities in SoE reporting during the InSEIS project to further formalise the concept and process for regular SoE indicator-based reporting. Work and next steps on Corine Land Cover (CLC) was also discussed in April.

Ukraine:

- A national high-level, inter-agency SEIS Working Group was established in 2014 through a decree of the Minister of Ecology and Natural Resources, but not been operational. Plan to set up a similar group to act as the SEIS National Implementation Team.
- A concept for reforming national environmental monitoring system has been developed in line with the Association Agreement requirements and is ready for adoption.
- Plans to expand the list of environmental indicators to cover a wider range of topics.
- Challenges in implementation link to the volatile political situation and still ongoing military conflict in part of the country that impacts the political priorities and the environment protection as a whole; frequent administrative changes should also be mentioned.



- Signing a Letter of Intent with the EEA to formalise the modalities of cooperation and link to Reportnet would be needed. Plans for stronger inter-institutional coordination, inter-sectoral exchange and link to civil society.
- The Corine Land Cover (CLC) pilot is very important for Ukraine, potentially going beyond the urban area pilot.
- There are expectations to build on the strengthened capacities in SoE reporting during the previous cooperation to further formalise the concept and process for regular SoER production. Guidance and training of experts in international reporting in compliance with EU Directives is very important.

In response to the point raised by a few countries requesting support to upgrading the national monitoring system, D. Stanners (EEA) clarified that EEA cannot provide support to building or upgrading one but could assist to contextualise the request and possibly look for other resources. Strategically the ENI SEIS II East project is aimed to provide support to the described areas of work (specific example of the Corine component was mentioned), based on the countries' vision for moving forward and building their environmental information systems.

A. Bularga (EC DG NEAR) stressed the importance of the link between the technical work (including analysis of the infrastructural gaps) and the end use of collected information for policy making. She referred to the upcoming Eastern Partnership Ministerial meeting in October 2016. The EU support is aiming to increase ownership of project results among end users.

REFLECTIONS FROM REPRESENTATIVES OF INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS

UNECE

Filip Aggestam, Environmental Affairs Officer in the Environment Division at UNECE, informed the meeting on the upcoming 18th session of the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment (WGEMA) on 28 - 29 June 2016, and the 11th Joint Task Force on Environmental Indicators (JTFEI) on 30 June - 1 July 2016 in Geneva. The WGEMA meeting will address, among other things, how to respond to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, piloting a reporting mechanism for establishing SEIS in the pan-European region, and discuss the assessment process (reflecting on the launch of the European Regional assessment of the Global Environment Outlook). The JTFEI meeting will discuss the environmental indicators in the context of current policy initiatives, the recommendations for the production and online sharing of the selected environmental indicators, as well as address conceptual and methodological problems related to waste statistics.

WHO

Dorota Jarosinska, Programme Manager in the WHO European Centre for Environment and Health (ECEH) in Bonn, highlighted that preparations are underway for the upcoming Environment and Health Ministerial Conference in 2017. Given the fact that a key topic of the current EfE conference was air quality and impacts on human health, the link between the Environment for Europe and Environment and Health processes was essential. Improving information will also feed into the work on environment and health in many Member States. Last year at a health assembly a resolution on environment/air and health has been adopted by Ministers of health, which the countries need to implement. This process will help building capacities both on national and regional level, even if some differences exist between WHO and EU statistical data on air quality and human health.



CONCLUSIONS AND WAY FORWARD

In conclusion, D. Stanners (EEA) thanked all the participants for their active contributions to the meeting and support to the start of the second phase of SEIS project work, and then outlined the next steps in the coming months:

- Continue the dialogue with the project NFPs and plan further project activities through the EEA visits to the five remaining countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia and Ukraine) in order to get wider country commitments and to discuss national priorities and activities to be included in the national work plans.
- Share findings from these visits at the first regional project Steering Committee meeting to be organised during last quarter of 2016 (dates to be identified).
- Maintain open dialogue with key partners and international organisations.
- As a point of information was mentioned the recruitment of project staff at the EEA currently ongoing, with plans to have the full team in place by the end of 2016. The new positions include a project coordinator, project officer on networking, communication and visibility support, and two project managers on cross-thematic support and integrated environmental assessments.
- A new project website is currently under development with meeting documents to be shared once it is fully in place: <http://eni-seis.eionet.europa.eu/east>.



Annex 1. AGENDA

First regional consultation meeting during the Batumi conference

Tuesday, 7th June 2016, 14:00-17:30

Venue: Hotel Oasis – Chakvi, Georgia

14:00	Opening and welcome Chair: David Stanners, Head of Programme, Partnerships and Network, European Environment Agency (EEA)
14:00-14:20	INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS David Stanners, EEA Angela Bularga, European Commission – DG NEAR WELCOME REMARKS Hans Bruyninckx, Executive Director, EEA TOUR DE TABLE
14:20-15:00	1st session Presentation of the ENI SEIS II East project
	GOALS AND MILESTONES THROUGHOUT THE ENI SEIS II EAST PROJECT Galina Hristova, Head of group, European policy neighbourhood activities, EEA Jean-Nicolas Poussart, Project Manager, Cooperation with European Neighbourhood countries, EEA Discussion / Q&A session
15:00-15:20	<i>Coffee break</i>
15:20-17:00	2nd session National perspectives – towards development of national work plans
	COORDINATION OF PROJECT ACTIVITIES AND NATIONAL EXPECTATIONS Interventions by country representatives: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine <i>Discussions will be structured around specific questions outlined in the background note</i> Q&A session
17:00-17:30	3rd session Synergies with partners for better regional coordination
	STREAMLINING REQUIREMENTS AND COOPERATION WITH INTERNATIONAL PARTNERS Synergy activities with relevant partners: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - UNECE - WHO - Relevant regional projects
17:20-17:30	WAY FORWARD & CONCLUDING REMARKS David Stanners, Head of Programme, Partnerships and Network, European Environment Agency (EEA)
17:30 - 19:00	<i>Reception</i>



Annex 2: List of participants

ENI SEIS II East project, First Regional Consultation Meeting

Tuesday, 7 June 2016, Chakvi, Georgia

No	Name	Position	E-mail
1.	Julieta Ghlichyan	Head of Strategic Program and Monitoring Division, Deputy Head of Monitoring of Environmental Strategic Program Department of the Ministry of Nature Protection, ARMENIA	julieta_ghlichyan@yahoo.com , interdpt@yahoo.com , interdpt@mnp.am , min_ecology@mnp.am
2.	Yurik Poghosyan	National Statistical Service of the Republic of ARMENIA	yupoghosyan@armstat.am , pogyura@yahoo.com
3.	Rena Lazimova	Head of energy and environment department, State Statistical Committee of the Republic of AZERBAIJAN	renalazim@yahoo.com , sc@azstat.org
4.	Elchin Mammadov	Advisor of Environmental policy division, Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources, AZERBAIJAN	evmamedov@mail.ru
5.	Natalia Zharkina	Head of analytical department of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection (MNREP), BELARUS	garkina_nat@mail.ru
6.	Ekaterina Poleshchuk	Head of the Environment Statistics Unit of the Agriculture and Environment Statistics Department, National Statistical Committee of the Republic of BELARUS	intcoop@mail.ru
7.	Maia Javakhishvili	Chief Specialist - Division of Sustainable Development and EU Integration Policy, Department of Environmental Policy and International Relations - Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources Protection of GEORGIA	m.javakhishvili@moe.gov.ge mjavakhishvili@gmail.com



8.	Vasil Tsakadze	National Statistics Office of GEORGIA (GEOSTAT)	vtsakadze@geostat.ge
9.	Irma Gurguliani	Deputy Head of the Waste and Chemicals Management Service, Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources Protection of GEORGIA	i.gurguliani@moe.gov.ge
10.	Veronica Lopotenco	Senior consultant in the Policy Analysis, Monitoring and Assessment Department of the Ministry of Environment, MOLDOVA	lopotenco@mediu.gov.md lopotenco.veronica@gmail.com
11.	Inga Podoroghin	State Secretary, Ministry of Environment, MOLDOVA	Inga.Podoroghin@mediu.gov.md
12.	Elena Orlova	Head of Agriculture and Environment Division of the National Bureau of Statistics, MOLDOVA	moldstat@statistica.md elena.orlov@statistica.md
13.	Dmytro Averin	First Deputy Director, Eastern Ukrainian Ecological Institute, UKRAINE	averin@euaeco.com
14.	Oleg Prokopenko	Director of the Department for Agricultural and Environment Statistics, State Statistics Service of UKRAINE (SSSU)	O.Prokopenko@ukrstat.gov.ua
15.	Johannes Mayer	Head of Unit, International Relations Umweltbundesamt GmbH-AUSTRIA	johannes.mayer@umweltbundesamt.at
16.	Angela Bularga	Programme Manager, European Commission Directorate-General for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR), Unit C/2 - Regional Programmes Neighbourhood East	Angela.Bularga@ec.europa.eu
17.	Hans Bruyninckx	Executive Director, European Environment Agency (EEA)	Hans.Bruyninckx@eea.europa.eu
18.	David Stanners	Head of Programme - Partnerships and Networks, EEA	David.Stanners@eea.europa.eu
19.	Galina Georgieva Hristova	Head of Group – European Neighbourhood Policy Activities, EEA	Galina.Georgieva@eea.europa.eu



20.	Jean-Nicolas Poussart	Project Manager - Cooperation with European Neighbourhood Countries, EEA	Jean-Nicolas.Poussart@eea.europa.eu
21.	Karin Blumenthal	European Commission – Eurostat, Unit on Environment statistics and accounts, sustainable development	Karin.BLUMENTHAL@ec.europa.eu
22.	Philippe Fichaux	Team Leader of the EaP Waste Statistics Project	philippe.fichaux@gmail.com
23.	Juergen Gonser	Senior Expert – EaP Waste Statistics Project	juergen.gonser@argus-statistik.de
24.	Dorota Jarosinska	WHO European Centre for Environment and Health (ECEH), Bonn, Germany	jarosinskad@ecehbonn.euro.who.int
25.	Filip Aggestam	Environmental Affairs Officer, Environment Division – United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE)	filip.agggestam@unece.org
26.	Nickolai Denisov	Zoi Environment Network	nickolai.denisov@zoinet.org
27.	Tamara Mitrofanenko	Zoi Environment Network	tamara.mitrofanenko@zoinet.org
28.	Malak Shukurova	The Regional Environmental Center for Caucasus	malak.shukurova@rec-caucasus.org

